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CIA Used Informant At W&M

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WILLIAMSBURG — The Central Intelligence Agency conducted a covert information-gathering operation on the College of William and Mary campus in the late 1960s and early 1970s, according to CIA documents obtained by the Flat Hat, the college's student newspaper.

In its current edition, an article by Jennifer McBride, a junior from Rocky Mount and the Flat Hat assistant news editor, related the information obtained from CIA files and reaction to the documents on campus.

The files, sought by the paper for the last two years under the Freedom of Information Act, showed that an unidentified informant on campus regularly reported to the CIA on campus "dissident" activities and other incidents that he believed were radical threats at William and Mary.

Similar Operations

There were a number of similar CIA operations at other colleges and universities in the United States, but William and Mary may have been chosen because of its proximity to Camp Peary, a few miles outside Williamsburg. The CIA still conducts its major training at the base.

There was no mention in the documents of any other Virginia college or university being involved in similar operations. It was learned last year, however, that the CIA helped finance "mind control" experiments at the University of Richmond in the 1960s and 1970s.

A CIA employee who asked to remain anonymous told the Flat Hat that the CIA's activities at William and Mary were part of Project Resistance, and a companion program, Merrimac, which were nationwide efforts "to monitor extremist activity against the agency."

The source said at the time the CIA feared that "someone was trying to overthrow the government" and that dissident student groups might be supported by communists.

Cathy Pherson, an employee in the CIA's public relations office in Washington, was quoted by the student paper, explaining that more specifically Project Resistance was aimed at "predicting violence or harassment that might affect agency recruiters on campus."

Project Resistance apparently was developed after the 1968 bombing of the CIA's recruiting office at the University of Michigan.

Ms. Pherson told the Flat Hat that the CIA acted under pressure from the White House and "if we're guilty of anything, it's of following orders."

J. Wilfred Lambert, retired William and Mary official who was vice president for student affairs during the 1969-71 activist period on campus, said he did not know there was a CIA presence at William and Mary.

He told the Flat Hat that if he had known of a CIA informant operating on campus, he would simply have told the CIA, "We are not aware of a need for your services."

The student paper said that substantial portions of the file that was eventually obtained were blacked out by the CIA, which claimed exemptions that permit withholding information related to national security and the protection of CIA sources and methods.

Part of the CIA data included an assessment of William and Mary and noted that the radical population of the school in 1970 included 10 professors and fewer than 200 students out of a student body of 3,800. Also included was information regarding the student action movement, the dissidents' organization and the notation of active support from three or four "weirdo professors."

The data from the informant in April 1970 also outlined noteworthy radical activity on campus, including several fires, "almost daily" fire and bomb threats telephoned to the campus switchboard, verbal threats of use of bombings and Molotov cocktails received by the college president, student pickets and two student sit-ins.

The informant concluded his report by predicting, the Flat Hat said, that "the College of William and Mary will undergo severe ferment and disorder in the coming year regardless of the national scene because the radical elements control most student functions." The Student Government Association and the Flat Hat were cited by the informant as major culprits.

Nancy Terrill, president of the student body in 1969-70 and contacted by the paper about the CIA file, said "the lack of surprise [at the revelation] doesn't lessen the anger." She currently is staff attorney for the Georgia Legal Services Program in Macon, Ga.

The Rev. Winifred Legerton, student body president in 1970-71, was also told of the file and said she objected to the CIA's portrayal of student protests as part of a cohesive force. Ms. Legerton, an ordained minister who is an educational management consultant in Charlottesville, said she saw them when they happened as "individual actions in different groupings."

Dr. David Jones, professor of philosophy, told the Flat Hat he probably was one of the CIA's "weirdo professors" in the file.

Dr. Jones added that the mention of "severe ferment" in the analysis indicated the "informant was trying to justify his salary" rather than be accurate. The typical William and Mary protest at the time was low-key and respectful, in keeping with the conservative background of the students, the paper said.

Dr. Jones added that student activism at William and Mary was directed more at loosening women's curfews and dress codes than at protesting the Vietnam War.

A member of the American Civil Liberties Union, Dr. Jones told the Flat Hat that he suspected then that his telephone was tapped and that his mail was being opened.

"A friend on the police force advised him [Jones] that 'the spooks were after him,'" the student paper said.

Dr. Jones and others contacted about the CIA file said they believed that an intelligence agency was spying on campus at the time, although most believed it was the FBI or Army intelligence.

The CIA was not considered because it was operating, by its charter, in foreign countries, one professor said. There also was no knowledge on campus of CIA activities at Camp Peary.

"The information contained in the file indicates that the CIA informant was a person closely connected with the college administration," the Flat Hat story said. "Specifically, a copy of a May 1970 letter that SA [Student Association] President Legerton wrote to Lambert appeared with the CIA documents."

Lambert "strongly denied" to the Flat Hat that he had passed the letter to the CIA. Carson H. Barnes, then William and Mary dean of students, also denied involvement or contact with the CIA.

The unidentified CIA source told the Flat Hat, regarding one document outlining a student protest, that "a reasonable inference could be drawn that the informant was a dean or assistant dean at the college."